

New Turfgrass Exhibit to Open in Washington, D.C.

Grass Roots Exhibit Illustrative Plan



The U.S. National Arboretum and the National Turfgrass Federation are collaborating in the development of a new exhibit in Washington, D.C., to highlight various uses of turfgrass. The exhibit is the centerpiece of the four-year "Grass Roots Initiative" that focuses on the environmental, economic and recreational benefits of turfgrass in landscapes, golf courses and athletic fields. The Grass Roots Initiative is "committed to helping citizens, including national decision-makers, understand new and emerging science underlying our nation's beautiful lawns, athletic fields and gardens," notes National Arboretum Director Dr. Colleen Hefferan.

The Initiative will feature a website accompanying the exhibit, as well as professional and scientific symposia and homeowner-focused workshops and demonstrations. Directed to audiences ranging from homeowners to professionals to policymakers, the Initiative will showcase the value of turf as an environmental asset when properly managed and the importance of research to continue to leverage that value. In addition, the Initiative is coordinating the National Arboretum, the National Mall and Arlington National Cemetery in an attempt to develop a "National Greenscape Corridor" that links the three facilities. It is also coordinating public messaging and outreach to raise awareness about the importance of sustainable turfgrass and landscape maintenance practices at these culturally historic landscapes.

The 1.3-acre exhibit space will be located near the front entrance of the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., which hosts about 500,000 visitors annually. Rain Underground, a Baltimore-based landscape architecture firm, donated the exhibit design, which will include displays featuring a compact golf hole, sports fields, lawn areas with a variety of warm- and cool-

season grass species, irrigation and fertilizer displays, a green roof using grasses and a rain garden demonstrating the ability of grass to absorb water and nutrients. In all, the exhibit will contain 14 interactive displays designed to engage visitors to learn more about turfgrass uses, history and best management practices for maintenance. Additionally, hundreds of ornamental grasses will link various elements of the exhibit and will thematically link the exhibit with other garden areas across the Arboretum's nearly 450 acres.

While plans for the exhibit have been in the works for over a year, a full-time Initiative coordinator, Geoff Rinehart, was hired last September, and the groundbreaking for the exhibit was last November. To date, the National Turfgrass Federation has raised \$400,000 over the four-year life of the exhibit for construction. Most of the construction will take place this spring as soon as the weather cooperates. In addition to monetary donations from over 15 sponsors, much of the labor and materials for the irrigation system, the golf display, sports fields, permeable paver pathways, green roof and sod installation are being donated or provided at a deep discount.

While turf associations in Maryland and Virginia may be most familiar with the project, Rinehart wants to elevate awareness about the exhibit on a national level "since this is not just a Washington, D.C. or a Mid-Atlantic project, but a national project." The exhibit is slated for a late-spring opening this year, and a grand opening date will be announced once the construction timelines become clearer. For more information about the exhibit or the Grass Roots Initiative, contact Geoff Rinehart at geoffrey.rinehart@ars.usda.gov or visit the Initiative Facebook page at facebook.com/NTFGrassRootsInitiative.



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